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ABSTRACT

Although reading paraprofessionals are not to be considered as teacher substitutes, (they are frequently used in routine and mechanical matters, freeing the regular teacher for more individualized instruction and lesson planning), they can make significant contributions in classroom instruction, student motivation, and public relations. Research has shown that by giving proper training to paraprofessionals (e.g., use of the Peabody Language Development Kit), more positive results in students' reading progress--increased attention span, gains in readiness, and increased word recognition--are achieved. Proper training also makes possible the use of educable mentally retarded adolescents, juvenile delinquents, senior citizens, and Viet Nam veterans as paraprofessionals. Studies further show that when the behavior of paraprofessionals is programmed, they are successful not only in developmental reading programs, but also as remedial reading assistants. Furthermore, use of paraprofessionals fosters positive community attitudes and increased community involvement. (Appended are references and a sample of reading students' attitudes toward paraprofessionals.) (HS)

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WHY PARAPROFESSIONALS IN READING?

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Introduction

By examining the cultures of many of our earlier civilizations it is obvious that paraprofessionals have assisted in the education of individuals, particularly youth, for many centuries. This is particularly true when we realize that in many of our primary civilizations there were no professional teachers. Specifically, it was the rule rather than the exception that the elders had the responsibility to teach the young. Quite apparent in our culture of today is the fact that we have had a long tradition of teaching by those who were not trained to teach. The educational influences made by parents, grandparents, siblings and peers--all technically paraprofessionals--can be easily documented.

Since the advent of Project Head Start Programs in the middle 1960's the paraprofessional or teacher aide concept has vastly increased in man-power numbers, the variety of educational settings, and also the diversity of the individuals who are providing the services as paraprofessionals. Because of the now well known National Right To Read Effort, prompted by the late Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, in addition to the development of the National Reading Center, dedicated to the achievement of functional literacy for all Americans in the next decade, we see more than ever an emphasis and stated reliance upon the utilization of nonprofessional man-power resources to get the non-reader to read and the poor reader to make substantial improvement.

RE004 134

In particular, the Ten Million Tutor Force (TMT) concept instituted by the National Reading Center requiring massive amounts of time, effort, and financial outlay is objective evidence of the faith and responsibility vested in trained volunteers to positively effect the reading progress of our nation's children, youth, and adults.

Paraprofessionals in Reading Defined

Paraprofessional personnel are individuals with varied amounts of education and/or professional training brought into the schools or any other setting to actively assist teachers in discharging their professional duties of educating children and youth in a more efficient and economical manner. They are not teacher substitutes, but are assigned the more routine and mechanical tasks, for the most part, in order to free the licensed teacher so that he/she may devote the major portion of time and energy to the execution of his professional responsibilities--individualization of instruction, lesson planning, and preparation. The functions of the paraprofessionals can be put into a variety of categories but most commonly under the headings of: 1) instructional, 2) motivational, 3) public relations, 4) clerical, and 5) housekeeping. The first three categories are the ones with which we are most concerned. It is these areas of instruction, motivation and public relations, as far as reading is concerned, that will require a certain degree of training.

Supply Sources and Effects of Paraprofessionals/Teacher Aides on Reading

A wide variety of individuals have been used and are currently being studied as paraprofessionals or teacher aides in reading. Cited in the literature are reports that fifth and sixth graders, high school dropouts, grandmothers, volunteers from various service clubs and college students can all make significant contributions to the students' reading skill. More specifically are reports of quite unique groups of individuals who have successfully served as

tutors as preliminary reports of ongoing research are indicating positive trends.

Research now in progress by Harris and Berry (1972) using adolescent educable mentally retarded boys and girls as tutors of first grade children in reading with Ellson's Programmed Tutorial Materials, is showing excellent initial results. Research in progress using juvenile delinquents residing in a short-term residential facility and also youth returned to the community on probation are being studied by Mauser and Kearns (1972). Thompson and Tobin (1971) report using retirees as volunteer tutors. Similarly, Keegan and MacLean (1971) have utilized residents from a senior citizens housing unit. Viet Nam veterans have also been successfully utilized as a part of the Career Opportunity Program (COP) cited by Anderson (1971). Finally, cited in the American School Board Journal(June, 1971) is a description of the volunteer tutoring conducted by a local school board member.

Recent research conducted with a paraprofessional or teacher aide component in reading, or aspects of the program related to reading, has suggested that positive effects can be shown when trained paraprofessionals or teacher aides are involved. Positive effects of the teacher aide concept in pre-school or readiness programs were cited in the research of Guess, Smith, and Ensminger (1971) which demonstrated that nonprofessional persons could be trained to develop and enhance speech and language skills using the Peabody Language Development Kits. Attention span improvement of kindergarten children that received instruction from trained teacher aides was reported by Hayden, Murdoch, and Quick (1969). Goralski and Kerl (1968) also found that significant gains in readiness were made by those children who were assisted by teacher aides. Hodgins, Karnes, and Teska (1970) reported that paraprofessional teachers who received sustained in-service training and daily supervision when working with pre-school disadvantaged children can fare as well as professionally-trained

teachers in implementing an instructional program for pre-school disadvantaged children. According to Schoeller and Pearson(1970), increased achievement gains and attitudinal gains for reading were shown by those children who received reading instruction from trained tutors. Additional support for the paraprofessional movement has been cited by Glass and Cohn (1970) who noted significant gains in word recognition(decoding) skills of children who received paraprofessional assistance. Similar findings were noted by Rogers (1970) who used paraprofessionals with first grade children. Specifically, it was noted that a "structured" approach was superior to an oral language approach in reading instruction that was supplemented by trained paraprofessionals.

When the behavior of the paraprofessional tutor is programmed such as indicated in the studies conducted by Ellson and associates(1968), McCleary (1971), Richardson and Collier(1971), further support for the paraprofessional is noted. In addition, Ellson (1970) has pointed out that through the use of programmed tutoring we can look for a reduction in the assignment of first grade children to special education and subsequently a greater retention of first graders in the regular educational mainstream rather than placement in the oftentimes stigmatizing environs of the special education class. Vellutino and Connolly (1971) reported that trained paraprofessionals had been successful serving as remedial reading assistants. From the past evidence cited, then, it might be stated that the role of the paraprofessional in reading programs can be assistive in both developmental reading and remedial reading types of instruction.

Finally, we must note the findings of Hadden (1970), Johnson(1970), and Riessman and Gartner (1969) which suggest that by the using of paraprofessionals we will find an increase in positive community attitudes and amount of community

involvement. The paraprofessional concept does offer another option to those individuals who are interested in working with children, but who at the present time do not desire to embark on a long-term training program. This is not to mean that we who support the paraprofessional movement are also a lot of social do-gooders who see the paraprofessional concept as a strategy to employ the "unemployable." When we are involved in educating our nation's youth we are committed to only those attempts which are quality in nature and implementation. Too many children who should be reading are not. Too many children who should be reading at a certain level are reading below that level. As we examine older approaches and practices the trained paraprofessional, used wisely, can significantly assist and enhance the teacher in their individual programs in reading to a degree that all children will have a much greater chance of reaching their potential in reading and, ultimately, in later life.

It is no longer a question of whether we should use paraprofessionals, but how do we best prepare them, utilize them, and fully tap their potential. School systems that introduce the well-trained teacher aide may provide for more individualization of instruction, more flexibility in classroom structure, more productive and manageable children, and also provide a closer alliance with the community.

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Appendix A

The following includes in rank order the most frequently cited advantages and disadvantages related to Paraprofessionals and Reading (Response sample from 60 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Intro. to Reading Disabilities:

Advantages

1. Allows for more one-to-one help (individualization) - 45.
2. Allows more effective time for the teacher in planning - 31.
3. Aids in building self-concepts of those tutored - 25.
4. Aids in increasing community involvement with schools - 20.
5. Assists child in specific skill help (drill) - 17.
6. An economical approach (see disadvantages, No. 6) - 15.
7. Can bring new ideas--fresh attitudes - 14.
8. Can prepare educational games and materials - 10.
9. Can assist the teacher in record keeping - 10.
10. Frees teacher to work in other areas (less than 10).
11. Can give immediate on-the-spot attention (less than 10).
12. Can provide pre-degree training for tutors (less than 10).
13. Allows for additional grouping (less than 10).
14. The tutor is not the authority figure as is teacher (less than 10).
15. The tutor can perform types of clerical work (less than 10).
16. Provides work for unemployed.

Disadvantages

1. Possible personality clashes - 30.
2. Inadequate training of paraprofessionals - 25.
3. Unprofessionalism--ethics - 20.
4. Learning process of children hurt if not programmed adequately - 17.
5. Monetary motivation--non-genuine interest.
6. More expensive.

7. Too much removal from class setting of children.
8. Role confusion.
9. Takes up extra space.
10. Overloaded with work by teacher (too much responsibility).
11. Overloaded teacher with responsibility.
12. Parents negative reaction to aide concept.
13. Poor aide continuity.
14. Sometimes the aide is brighter and more creative than teacher.